

Sūrah Al-Burūj (Stellar Formations)

This Sūrah is Makkī, and it has 22 verses

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 22

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ ﴿١﴾ وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ ﴿٢﴾ وَشَاهِدٍ
وَمَشْهُودٍ ﴿٣﴾ قَتَلَ أَصْحَبُ الْأُخْدُودِ ﴿٤﴾ النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ ﴿٥﴾
إِذْهُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُوعُودٌ ﴿٦﴾ وَهُمْ عَلَى مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ ﴿٧﴾
وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٨﴾ الَّذِي لَهُ
مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٩﴾ إِنَّ
الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٠﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتُ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿١١﴾ إِنَّ بَطْشَ
رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾ إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَيُعِيدُ ﴿١٣﴾ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْودُودُ
﴿١٤﴾ ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾ فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾ هَلْ أُنِتُكَ
حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ ﴿١٧﴾ فِرْعَوْنُ وَثَمُودُ ﴿١٨﴾ بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي
تَكْذِيبٍ ﴿١٩﴾ وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٢٠﴾ بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ
﴿٢١﴾ فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

I swear by the sky, the one having stellar formations, [1] and by the Promised Day, [2] and by that which attends, and that which is attended, [3] cursed were the People of the Trench, [4] the (people of the) fire that was rich with fuel, [5] when they were sitting by it, [6] and were watching what they were doing with the believers. [7] And they had blamed them for nothing but that they believed in Allah, the All-Mighty, the Worthy of All Praise, [8] the One to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is witness over every thing. [9] Surely, those who persecuted the believing men and the believing women, then did not repent, for them there is the torment of Jahannam (Hell), and for them there is the torment of burning. [10] As for those who believed and did righteous deeds, for them there are gardens beneath which rivers flow. That is the big achievement. [11]

The seizure of your Lord is severe indeed! [12] Surely He originates (creation) and repeats (it after death). [13] And He is the Most-Forgiving, the Most-Loving, [14] the Master of the Throne, the Glorious. [15] He is ever doer of what He intends. [16]

Has the come to you the story of the forces, [17] of Fir'aun (the Pharaoh) and Thamud? [18] But those who disbelieve are (engaged) in denying (the truth). [19] And Allah has encircled them from all sides. [20] The reality is that it is the glorious Qur'an, [21] (recorded) in the Preserved Tablet (Lauh Mahfuz). [22]

Commentary

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ (I swear by the sky, the one having stellar formations....85:1) The word *burūj* is the plural of *burj* which means 'a large mansion or fortress'. The Qur'an says:

وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ

'...even though you are in fortified castles [4:78]'

Here the word *burūj* means 'castles'. The primitive sense of the word *barj* is to become manifest'. The word *tabarruj* means 'to display one's beauty' as in the verse:

وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى

'...and do not display your beauty as it was previously displayed

in the Time of Ignorance [33:33]'

According to the majority of commentators like Sayyidnā Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, Dahḥāk, Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī, Qatādah, Suddī ﷺ and others, the word *burūj*, in this verse, refers to 'giant stars'. Other commentators take the word *burūj*, in this place, to refer to mansions and castles that are reserved in the sky for the guardian angels. Some of the later commentators chose the astronomical view in which the sky is divided into twelve parts, each one called a *burj*. The primitive philosophers believed that the *thawabit* (stationary) stars are fixed in these *burūj*. The planets move with the movement of their particular sky and the planets descend in these *burūj*. But this is absolutely incorrect. According to the Qur’ān, Allah has not fixed the stars and planets in the skies. In fact, every star and planet has its own orbit and revolves by itself as in Sūrah Yā Sīn:

وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

'...And each one is floating in an orbit. [36:40]'

The word *falak* in this verse does not refer to the sky, but rather to the orbits of the stars and planets in which they move. [Mazharī]

وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ. وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ (and by the Promised Day, and by that which attends, and that which is attended...85:2,3) With reference to a prophetic *Ḥadīth* reported by Tirmidhī, the phrase 'the Promised Day' refers to the Day of Judgement; the phrase 'that which attends' refers to 'Friday'; and the phrase 'that which is attended' refers to the day of ‘Arafah. Thus in this verse, Allah has taken oath by four objects: [1] 'the sky, the one having stellar formations'; [2] 'the Day of Judgement'; [3] 'Friday'; and [4] 'the Day of ‘Arafah'. The relationship between the objects of oath and the subject of oath is as follows: They bear evidence to the Divine omnipotence, and they are a proof of reckoning and reward and punishment on the Day of Judgement. Friday and the day of ‘Arafah (the main day of Hajj that is 9th Zul-Hijjah of the Islami Calender) are blessed days for the believers to accumulate treasures for the Hereafter. Further, the subject of oath curses the infidels who burned the Muslims on account of their faith, and gives cheerful news to the righteous believers of securing elevated ranks in the Hereafter.

The Story of the People of Trench

Verse 4 refers to the People of the Trench. Their story is recounted in a

Ḥadīth reported by Imām Muslim as follows: There was an infidel king who lived in bygone times. He had a soothsayer , or, according to some narrations, a magician. The infidel king is identified as the ruler of Yemen. His name, according to Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ, was Yūsuf Dhu Nuwās, and he lived about seventy years before the birth of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. The soothsayer or magician [occult teacher] said to the king that he should be given an intelligent boy, so that he could train him in the skill of foretelling or the black magic. Accordingly, the king sent a boy, ‘Abdullāh Ibn Tāmīr by name, to be trained by the soothsayer or magician [occult teacher]. Whenever the boy went to his teacher, he had to pass by a Christian monk. He followed the true religion of ‘Isā ؑ and worshipped Allah. Since the religion of ‘Isā ؑ was the true religion in those days, the monk was, in fact, a Muslim. The boy sat with the monk and was very much impressed by his teachings. As a result, he frequented the monk's house and sat with him for long hours before proceeding to his teacher, and ultimately embraced Islam. Allah had blessed him with such a strong faith that he was prepared to bear any pain and persecution for the sake of Allah. His teacher used to beat him for his coming late. On his way back from the occult teacher, he would spend some time again with the monk and used to go home late. The family would then beat him up for being late. But he was so keen to have the company of the monk that he managed to sit regularly with the monk without fear of persecution. Through the blessings of this, Allah had gifted him with many miracles [*karamah*]. Once it happened that the boy saw a lion has blocked the path and prevented people from passing. They were perturbed. He picked a stone and prayed: "O Allah! If the religion of the monk is true, then kill this beast with this stone [so that people may pass]. And if the soothsayer or magician is true, then the beast must not die with my stone." So praying, he aimed at the lion and it died instantly. The news spread among the people that the boy possesses wonderful knowledge. A blind man heard about this and came up to him. He requested him to restore his sight. The boy conceded on the condition that he embraces Islam. The blind man agreed. The boy prayed and Allah restored his sight. The blind man became Muslim. The king came to know about these incidents, and he got the boy, the monk and the blind were apprehended. They were brought before the king. He got the blind and the monk killed, and ordered that the boy be taken to the summit of a mountain and be thrown

from there. But those who had taken him up there fell and died. The boy went home safely. Then the king ordered to have him drowned in the sea. The boy escaped safely, while the people who took him to the sea were drowned. The boy then himself told the king how to kill him. He told him to take an arrow from his quiver and place it in his bow, and reciting, بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّبِّیْ 'In the name of Allah, my Lord' they should shoot. They did that and they boy finally died. In this way, the boy gave his life away but seeing this, the entire nation of the king cried out spontaneously: "We believe in Allah." At this, the king was greatly enraged and, after consultation with his cabinet, ordered for deep trenches to be dug and filled with fire. An announcement was then made that the people must renounce their faith in Allah. If they refuse, they would be thrown into the fiery furnace. Eventually, a woman carrying her infant child was brought to a trench, but she hesitated. Allah granted speech to her child who said: "O mother, be steadfast, because you are certainly on the truth." In this way, many people were burned. According to some reports, about twelve thousand people were burned to ashes and, according to other reports, the number is put more than this. Consequently, Divine wrath descended on the People of the Trench and fiery furnace. Reference in verse 4 is made to this incident after taking an oath.

In a narration of Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, it is reported that the place where the boy ‘Abdullāh Ibn Tāmīr was buried had to be dug up for some important reason during the time of Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضی اللہ عنہ. It was found that the body of ‘Abdullāh Ibn Tāmīr was intact, and he was sitting up. His hand was placed on his hip joint, where the arrow struck him. Someone moved his hand out from that place, and his wound started bleeding. When the hand was placed back in its position, the bleeding stopped. There was a ring in his finger which had the inscription: اللَّهُ رَبِّیْ "Allah is my Lord." The governor of Yemen informed Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضی اللہ عنہ about this, and he wrote back in reply: "Bury the body back as it was with his finger-ring." [Ibn Kathīr]

Special Note

Ibn Kathīr, with reference to Ibn Abī Ḥātim, writes that the incidents of 'trenches of fire' took place many times in history in different parts of the world. Then Ibn Abī Ḥātim specifies three particular incidents: [1] a trench in Yemen. [This incident took place during the period of *fatrah*

(the interval between 'Isā عليه السلام and the Holy Prophet ﷺ), about seventy years before the advent of the Prophet ﷺ; [2] a trench in Syria; and [3] a trench in Irān. He further states that the incident the Qur'ān refers to here in Sūrah Burūj is the first one that occurred in Najrān, the trench of the kingdom of Yemen, because that was in Arabia.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَتَلُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا (Surely, those who persecuted the believing men and the believing women, then did not repent,...85:10) This verse describes the torment of the wrong-doers who burned the Muslims in the fire pit only on account of their faith. The description points out two things: [1] فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ جَهَنَّمَ (for them there is the torment of Jahannam) and [2] وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ الْحَرِيقِ (and for them there is the torment of burning). The second sentence may be treated as explicative of the first sentence, a statement for emphasis. It signifies that they will be put into Hell and will have to suffer eternal torment of the fire. Another possible interpretation is that the second statement describes the wrong-doers' torment in this world, as is narrated in some reports. The believers, who had been cast in fire pits, were spared the torture of fire, in that the souls of the believers were taken out before the fire could touch them. Only their dead bodies were lying in the fiery furnace. After that the fire flared up so high that it spread out wildly through the city and burned all those who were watching the fun of burning the Muslims. Only Yūsuf Dhu Nuwās managed to run away, and threw himself into the sea in order to save himself from the rage of the fire, but he got drowned and died. [Maẓharī].

Attached to the torment of Hell and the torment of burning for the wrong-doers is the restrictive phrase: ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا (then did not repent). That is, this torment is for those who did not repent of their deed and did not offer *taubah*. Thus this part of the verse invites people to repent. Sayyidnā Ḥasan رضي الله عنه states: "Look at Allah's compassion and benevolence. They burned Allah's friends alive, yet He invites them towards repentance and forgiveness." [Ibn Kathir].

Alḥamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Burūj
Ends here